Embodied Performance through the *Indita* Ballad of the U.S. Southwest Borderlands

In this study, I conduct an ethnographic account of embodied performance through two feminine-voiced ballads of Territorial New Mexico known as la finada Paula Ángel which recounts the only legal hanging of a woman in Territorial New Mexico and la indita de Juliana Ortega, narrating the account of a young child who was married against her will. I interview singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares and musician and poet Brenda Romero who perform the ballads to show how embodied performance recovers, reclaims, and revitalizes histories that have been omitted from the U.S. official historical record. I integrate multi-modal experiences as the reader will be able to listen to the recordings of the ballads used in this study. I show how these embodied cultural expressions have the potential to both process and heal traumatic histories through cultural agency. I question, how are the performers grappling with the difficult borderlands' histories through their embodied performances? Given that many of these histories are not often learned through the public education system, how is the first-person narrative voice influencing the performers' understanding of their own histories? How are they channeling traumatic cultural memory through embodied performance?

Keywords: *Performance, Music, Women, Mexican-American, borderlands*

Introduction

In the recent editorial opinion piece entitled, "The Global Struggle for Equality for Women and Girls" author Joseph Chamie addresses a multi-faceted approach to achieve women's equality:

> Achieving women's equality requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes ensuring their basic human rights, enforcing legal protections against discrimination and violence, ensuring equal pay, education access, economic empowerment, and opportunities, promoting women in leadership roles, dismantling misogynistic stereotypes, advancing inclusive policies, supporting women-led institutions, and encouraging shared domestic responsibility.[1]

In this study, I respond to Chamie's call to advance inclusive policies and dismantle misogynistic stereotypes through female-led performance. It is through both the embodiment and what singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares speaks to as "honoring the suffering." It is what scholar and musician Brenda Romero recognizes as an important part of processing and relating communal trauma through performance. In this study, I show how embodied performance has the capacity to confront notions of patriarchal-induced trauma and

[1]See Chamie, Joseph, ""The Global Struggle for Equality for Women and Girls," 2026.

colonization as the struggle for women equality continues on both a global and local level.

According to the United Nations, "On average, 137 women and girls were killed every day in 2024 by someone in their own family" (6). Furthermore, "Latin America is home to 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, with Mexico being one of them" (Diaz, 2021; Datta, 2026). "Across Mexico**,** approximately 10 women and girls are killed every day and are forgotten, perpetuating a cycle of impunity" (Datta, 2026). Across the border from Mexico, in New Mexico eleven women went missing in the Albuquerque area, later to be found buried by a new construction site. Chicana studies scholar Bernadine Hernández notes this disappearance is directly tied to the women being victims of gendered, racial, and sexual violence as they were all portrayed within these confines by the local police department.[2] The campaign, Indigenous Women Rising notes that Indigenous women within the United States have had "disproportionately high rates of domestic violence and sexual assault on reservations and…limited capability…to prosecute non-native offenders" (Lorenzo, 2023). When addressing imposter syndrome in professional academic roles at the University of Colorado, Boulder; ethnomusicologist Brenda Romero notes that most *women* in the professoriate suffer from this condition (2026, 79). She notes, that the "canon has never accepted women on the same par as men" and that this condition has been long instilled in the dichotomy of suppressing women in terms of equating sounds of women and children to non-European people and the sounds of males to culture, intelligent minds, and European music (Romero, 79; Ellingson 1992b, 113). addition to the examples mentioned, the recovery of Mexican American women's voices and histories is also difficult to locate in the U.S. official history (Roybal, 5).

In this study, I focus on the U.S. Southwest borderlands while utilizing performance-based practices as a lens to put into focus the relationship between embodied acts of historical trauma endured by Mexican American women known as *nuevomexicanas* and the ways in which these acts challenge notions of patriarchy and colonialism. In effect, I show how performance works through complicated histories of violence as a form of cultural agency and as a form of healing.

The U.S. Southwest borderlands is known to what Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa termed as *una herrida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. She states, "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants." Within this interstitial space of the U.S. Southwest borderlands sits present-day New Mexico as seen in Figure 1. Next to it in Figure 2 is a map of the Republic of Mexico prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 in which the U.S. annexed of

[2]Hernández mentions that the local Albuquerque Police department publicly portrayed the women as non-white, from a lower social class, and as prostitutes and sex workers involved in drugs (2022:1).

over half of Mexico. With the end of the U.S.-Mexican War, New Mexico became a Territory of the United States and held this territorial status for over sixty years until it became a state in the Union in 1912.

Figure 1. *Present-day New Mexico*

Figure 2. *Mexico prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1824-1848)*

Throughout New Mexico's colonized history as a Territory of the U.S. to the present day, social injustices grew rampant with many tragic consequences faced by *nuevomexicanas.* From expressing tragic histories such as the only legal execution of a woman in Territorial New Mexico in 1861 to the enslavement of women and children in the borderlands, these are some examples in which performance-based cultural expressions serve as a means of grappling with such dire circumstances. In New Mexico, like many other underrepresented regions

of the U.S. Southwest borderlands; the teachings and practices of local histories, languages, and cultures are often omitted from public learning spaces and from the U.S. official history. New Mexico was encased in what scholar Mary Luise Pratt terms as a contact zone: a "space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict."[3] Within a confluence of cultures, languages, and worldviews; oral tradition and performance art flourished as an outlet to voice social injustices.

One performance-based oral tradition known in the region is the highly poetic and stylized folk performance art form of *indita* ballad. Functioning as a means of memorializing those who have passed in often horrific manners, as noted by ethnomusicologist Brenda Romero, *indita* ballads transpose the moral economy of the community while they come to terms with such tragedies and often serve as a means of closure. Like the popular Mexican ballad form of the *corrido*, *inditas* follow a similar poetic structure. Each verse is typically four octosyllabic lines with assonance rhyme in the second and fourth lines. Unlike the *corrido*, however, *inditas* are primarily composed in the first person, allowing performers to fully embody the protagonists. This example shows both the rhyme scheme and the first-person narrative voice:

Eran tantos **mis** trabajos	My labors were so many
y tanto **mi** padecer,	and so much my suffering,
que no **tenía** libertad	that I was not at liberty
ni aun para poder comer.	even to eat.[4]

In this study, I conduct an ethnographic account of embodied performance through two feminine-voiced *indita* ballads of Territorial New Mexico known as *la finada Paula Ángel* which recounts the only legal hanging of a woman in Territorial New Mexico and *la indita de Juliana Ortega,* narrating the account of a young child who was married against her will. I interview singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares and musician and poet Brenda Romero who perform the ballads to show how embodied performance functions as a means to recover, reclaim, and revitalize histories that have been omitted from the U.S. official historical record. Through a discussion of their embodied performances, I show how these embodied cultural expressions have the potential to both process and heal traumatic histories through cultural agency. I questions, how are the performers grappling with the difficult borderlands' histories through their embodied performances? Given that many of these histories are not often learned through the public education system, how is the first-person narrative voice influencing the performers' understanding of their own histories? In addition, how are their renditions and their creations of *indita* ballads changing over time through embodied performances? In effect, how are they reimagining a

[3]Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes.* p. 6.
[4]*La indita de Juliana Ortega.*

collective cultural memory within the New Mexico borderlands through both their musicality and through embodied performance of the *indita*?

To answer these questions, I start with a literature review of U.S. Southwest borderlands scholarship, performance theory, ballad scholarship. Specifically, I draw on recent scholarship at the juncture of performance studies, borderlands studies (including borderlands performance), Chicana feminism, and critical Latinx pedagogies to highlight how embodied acts of transfer in the performances of *la finada Paula Ángel* and *la indita de Juliana Ortega* serve as a culturally sustaining practices within the U.S. Southwest borderlands. This is followed by a section on methodology outlining the interview questions for each participant. Then each *indita, la finada Paula Ángel* and *la indita de Juliana Ortega,* will have two sections. Each section contains an introduction to the ballad, an audio component for readers to listen to the performed recordings, and interview excerpts with Lara Manzanares and Brenda Romero. This is then followed by a discussion on cultural agency through embodied performances.

Literature Review

Seminal Chicana feminist playwrights show how performance plays a fundamental role in confronting patriarchal and colonial ideologies by embracing traumatic histories as forms of empowerment and healing through performance. In *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2001), Cherrie Moraga fuses Western and Chicana mythology to challenge patriarchal and colonial norms. Adelina Anthony's *Las Hociconas* (2013) uses the body, both collective and individual, "as the site where consciousness erupts" and transmutes "suffering into power" (i). The anthology, *Performing the US Latina and Latino in the Borderlands* (2012) edited by Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García is a much-needed borderlands performance studies anthology utilizing "de-colonizing performatics" and "perform-antics"[5] to show how "*culture is performance"* (1). The anthology exemplifies this notion through emancipatory aesthetics enabling empowerment through performance. It addresses the urgent need of a people, a community, and a region to "become visible by telling, performing, and witnessing"(8). Additionally, de-colonization through borderlands' performances enables healing for the participants and for the community. One modality of making the invisible visible, of resisting hegemonic norms, and of offering an outlet to trauma within the borderlands is through the profound ballad tradition.

Ballad scholarship in the borderlands abounds. From Martha Chew Sánchez's *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (2006), Américo Paredes' *With His*

[5]The editors refer to de-colonizing performatics and antics as those which are "*designed interventionist actions* that intercede on behalf of egalitarianism within any larger (cultural or aesthetic) performance" and are"the specific manufactured components, no matter how small or large, of a greater mind-body-affect and social circuit that is aimed toward the de-colonization of meaning" and refers to an aesthetics of liberation (6-7).

Pistol in His Hand (1958), and José Limón's *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (1992); each of these works document how ballad traditions are crucial to challenging dominant narratives while providing an outlet for community members to voice their struggles and their resistance to colonialism. Within New Mexico, a long trajectory of ballad traditions are documented in the works of folklorists Aurelio Espinosa, Rubén Cobos, Juan B. Rael, and John D. Robb.[6] Ballad scholarship in New Mexico includes those of renowned musicologist of Mexico, Vicente Mendoza; musicologist Brenda Romero, and folklorists Jack and Katherine Loeffler and Enrique Lamadrid amongst others.[7] Scholarship dedicated to dramatic performances within New Mexico show how festival traditions reenact histories of violence and colonialism. From the mock-battle drama of the *moros y cristianos* which recounts battles of Islamic and Christian wars of Spain,[8] to the ritual folk dance performances of the *danza de los matachines*[9] depicting Indigenous and Hispano syncretism, and dramatic performances of children held captive in the drama *Los Comanches*; each of these dramatic performances not only revisit histories of trauma, but through their embodiment, they do so to remember their histories and to come to terms with them.

As mentioned in the introduction, I draw on recent scholarship at the juncture of performance studies, borderlands studies (including borderlands

[6]See Espinosa, Aurelio Macedonio. *Romancero Nuevomejicano*. New York [etc., 1915. The Rubén Cobos Collection of Southwestern Folklore and Folk Music John D. Robb collection is held at the University of New Mexico. Juan B. Rael's collection is held with the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and is also accessible digitally: https://findingaids.loc.gov/repositories/3/resources/183.

[7]See Mendoza, Vicente T., and Virginia RR De Mendoza. *Estudio y clasificación de la música tradicional hispánica de Nuevo México*. 1986. See also Romero, Brenda. "The Indita Genre of New Mexico," *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change.* Edited by Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. See also Loeffler, Jack, Katherine. Lamadrid, Loeffler, Katherine, and Lamadrid, Enrique R., *La Música De Los Viejitos: Hispano Folk Music of the Rio Grande Del Norte*, 1999. See also Lamadrid, Enrique R. ""El Corrido De Tomóchic:" Honor, Grace, Gender, and Power in the First Ballad of the Mexican Revolution" *Journal of the Southwest 41*, no. 4 (1999): 441-60. See also Lamadrid, Enrique. "El sentimiento trágico de la vida," *Aztlán* 22.1, 1997. See also Lamadrid, Enrique. *"La indita de San Luis Gonzaga*: War with Spain, Faith, and Ethnic Relations in the Evolution of a New Mexican Religious Ballad," in *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* edited by Aranda, José F, and Torres-Saillant, Silvio. Houston, Texas: Arte Público, 2002. See also, Lamadrid, Enrique R. "Los Corridos De Río Arriba: Two Ballads of the Land Grant Movement, 1965-70." *Aztlán* 17, no. 2 (1986).

[8]See Garcia, David F. "Moros y Cristianos: Intangible Cultural Exchange along the Camino Real." (2007).

[9]See Harris, Max. "The Return of Moctezuma: Oaxaca's" Danza de la Pluma" and New Mexico's" Danza de los Matachines"." *TDR (1988-)* 41, no. 1 (1997): 106-134. See also Romero, Brenda M., and Phillip B. Gonzales. "La Danza Matachines as New Mexican Heritage." *Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano creativity, ritual, and memory* (2007): 61-84. See also Romero, Brenda Mae. *The Matachines music and dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcalde, New Mexico: contexts and meanings*. University of California, Los Angeles, 1993. See also Rodriguez, Sylvia, and Sylvia Rodriguez. *The Matachines Dance: A Ritual Dance of the Indian Pueblos and Mexicano/Hispano Communities*. Sunstone Press, 2009.

performance), Chicana feminism, and critical Latinx pedagogies to highlight how embodied acts of transfer in the performances of *la finada Paula Ángel* and *la indita de Juliana Ortega* serve as a culturally sustaining practices within the U.S. Southwest borderlands. This research is grounded in Chicana feminism in that:

> Unlike other feminisms, Chicana feminisms have an added emphasis on Mexican and
> Chicana/o cultures and histories, the importance of the Spanish language, and the examination of structural variables that affect power and privilege.[10]

Coupled with culturally sustaining pedagogies and practices which stress the importance of decolonizing education by *centering* underrepresented experiences, histories, languages, and communities; I advocate for the importance of cultural agency through performance (Alim, Paris, 2017).

In addition to *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands,* performance studies scholarship includes Diana Taylor's *The Archive and The Repertoire* (2012), Astrid Fellner's "Recovering Queequeq's Body: Performing Alterna(raa)tives in the Borderlands" (2017) and Katherine Johnson's "Performing Pasts for Present Purposes: Reenactment as Embodied, Performative History" (2015) are essential for this study.

Borderlands scholars Shantel Martinez and Kelly Medina-López's *Monsters and Saints: LatIndigenous Landscapes and Spectral Storytelling* (2024) apply the concept of "Border Indigeneity" which exhumes "the buried and repressed spectral stories submerged deep in the bones, in the flesh"[11] to highlight how spectral storytelling is embraced to challenge notions of settler-colonialism. New Mexico borderlands scholars Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez, Levi Romero, and Spencer Herrera's edited series, *Querencia: Reflections on the New Mexico Homeland* (2020) combats dominant systems of erasure through critical reflections on what is known as *querencia*—the love of home and connection to place.

Latinx critical pedagogy used for this study includes G. Reyes (et. Al) "We're All in This Boat Together": Latina/Chicana Embodied Pedagogies of Care (2023), and Casie Cobos' "Embodied Storying, a Methodology for Chican@ Rhetorics" (2012). Reyes (et.al) posit what they term "embodied pedagogies of care" (EPC) for historically marginalized Latino students. Their focus is on the "interactions, the sharing of personalized experiences, and relationship building as pedagogy" (471). Cobos coins "embodying storying" to combat marginalization through the (re)telling of stories (40). Each of these studies are valuable contributions to the ways in which embodied performance is an essential modality of expression in the U.S. Southwest borderlands and I will return to them throughout the article.

[10]Hurtado, Aída. *Intersectional Chicana Feminisms: Sitios Y Lenguas*, (2020): 8.
[11]Scorcia Pacheco, Carmella. Review on "Monsters and Saints: LatIndigenous Landscapes and Spectral Storytelling" *Journal of American Folklore,* (139: 2026).

Methodology

The following sections will introduce and contextualize the ballads, *la finada Paula Ángel* and *la indita de Juliana Ortega* followed by a discussion and review of interviews conducted with performers of the ballads, Lara Manzanares and Brenda Romero. Both singers were asked to perform the ballads to be included as professional recordings to be shared with the community. Key questions and excerpts of the interviews will be highlighted and connected to recent literature. Interview questions include:

- Had you previously known about the specific protagonist prior to being asked to perform the ballad?
- What was the process like learning about the specific protagonist?
- How did it make you feel to sing it in the first person?
- Did you feel you came to know the protagonist in some way?
- Do you believe her story/ballad is an important one to share?
- Is it important, in your opinion, that we as Nuevo Mexicanos go to these difficult places to learn these histories?
- What are your hopes in terms of how the audience perceives it, receives it, understands it, and in essence, understands more of their own history?
- What are your hopes for the future in terms of her story, her ballad, her performance?
- Do you think more people ought to be involved in embodying our histories?
- Through performance, do you believe it can serve as a form of healing in any way?

Each of these questions are essential in connecting the process of reclaiming violent histories through performance serves as a means of processing traumatic histories through cultural agency. I will now introduce the first ballad, *la finada de Paula Ángel* followed by a discussion with performer and vocalist, Lara Manzanares.

Introduction to *La finada Paula Ángel*

La finada Paula Ángel, or The Late Paula Ángel, recounts the tragic legal hanging of a *nuevomexicana* during Territorial New Mexico in the mid-1800s. Several versions of what exactly happened exist. One version is that Ángel, affectionately known as Pablita, was perhaps around the age of nineteen years old at the time when she lured her lover Miguel Martín into meeting her.[12] Ángel,

[12]One hundred years after Ángel's execution, her account was retold by former New Mexico district court Judge, Luis E. Armijo and published by Ernie Thwaites in the *New Mexican* in 1961. Armijo, whose grandmother witnessed the execution and had recounted the narrative to him, then transmitted the narrative to Thwaites and to Armijo's granddaughter—former New Mexico district court Judge, Christina Armijo. Christina Armijo also worked to explain the legal

upset with his unrequited love, embraced Martín for the last time and killed him. There are other versions of what transpired that day, but what is certain is that Ángel was sentenced to death by hanging after the *all-male* jury convicted her of first-degree murder on March 26, 1861, in the northern New Mexico town of Las Vegas.

As part of her sentence, Ángel remained in the local jail house for a month leading up to her execution. Oral tradition notes that the Sherriff, Antonio Abad Herrera taunted Ángel each day letting her know just how many days she had left. On the day of her execution, she was taken to a cottonwood tree outside of the town. The Sherrif hung her, yet he failed to tie her hands. She struggled to break loose while those witnessing the scene protested and demanded her to be released. The Sherrif was adamant to finish the execution as the sentence stated that she be "hung by the neck until dead" between "ten o'clock in the forenoon and four o'clock in the afternoon" (Armijo 2012: 317).[13] Ángel was executed and died on April 26, 1861. Her ballad, *la finada Paula Ángel* was most likely created during or soon after her execution as a means for her family and community members to make sense of such a horrific episode.

La finada Paula Ángel was originally composed by Paula Ángel's cousin, Juan Ángel and is included in Aurelio Espinosa's *Romancero Nuevomejicano* (1915). Composed in the first person, Ángel's voice is heard throughout the ballad. She repents for her actions, warns others not to fall into the same fate as her, and offers her farewell wishes. Within a predominantly Catholic community, Ángel laments to Mary of Guadalupe, Santo Niño de Atocha, the Mother of Sorrows (*Madre de los dolores)* amongst others. The original version is extensive with thirty-eight verses. The ballad spread from community to community and became one of the most well-known *inditas* in New Mexico. Over time, variants of the ballad became shorter while still maintaining key features including Ángel's actions, her reason for her actions, her lament, and her *despedida* or farewell as seen in these verses from a more recent variant:

2. El Maldito me insistió	2. The Evil one insisted
hacer tan grande avería,	that I cause such great
danger,	
el Maldito me insistió	the Evil one insisted
hacer tan grande avería.	that I cause such great
danger.	
5. A muerte me sentenciaron	5. They sentenced me to
death	
porque maté a Miguelito,	because I killed Miguelito,

dynamics in Ángel's case, *The Territory of New Mexico versus Paula Angel.* See Armijo, M. Christina. "Territory of New Mexico vs. Paula Angel: One Woman's Tragic Journey through Territorial Justice in 1861," *New Mexico Law Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2012. See also Thwaites, Ernie. "Bizarre Frontier Hanging Recalled," *New Mexican.* April 28, 1961. Thwaites article was later republished in Peter Hertzog's *Legal Hangings* (Santa Fe: Press of the Territorian, 1966), p. 7-9.

[13]Here, Armijo presents the court docket of Angel's sentence.

a muerte me sentenciaron	They sentenced me to death
porque maté a Miguelito.	because I killed Miguelito.
9. Adiós mis dos hermanitos	9. Good-bye my two little brothers
échenme la bendición,	give me your blessing,
Adiós mis dos hermanitos	good-bye my two little brothers
échenme la bendición.	give me your blessings.

These verses are from variants performed by singer Julia Jaramillo and recorded in 1986. Sung in a capella without any musical accompaniment, readers may listen to her here. More recently, renowned New Mexican singer-song writer Lara Manzanares, along with New Mexico roots group, Lone Piñón, created their own rendition of *la finada Paula Ángel.* Utilizing the same lyrics as Jaramillo, this rendition has the same number of verses, yet striking differences are heard through Manzanares' vocals as well as musical accompaniment with Lone Piñón. Readers may listen to this version here.

Interview with Lara Manzanares

During the interview with Manzanares, key topics that resonated throughout the conversation included her connection to the protagonist, Paula Ángel; the effect of the first-person narrative voice, her metaphor for vocalizing and embodying Ángel, and how this history reverberates with the importance of processing traumatic histories through performance. Although *la finada Paula Ángel* spread amongst various communities of northern New Mexico, Manzanares' experience of not having been exposed to Ángel's history is not uncommon for many *nuevomexicanos* learning about the Territorial history of New Mexico. Yet, when I (abbreviation CS below) asked Manzanares (LM) about what it was like to learn about Ángel through the ballad, she had a deep connection:

CS
What was it like for the first time to learn about this woman through this ballad?

LM
It was fascinating. First of all, because it was written in her voice. It felt very personal…and very painful. In kind of a cool way, though.
You know, it's like when you open up a box that's in your grandma's closet and you find all these old photos of people that you know you're related to them and you can sort of feel their presence in a way, but you've never actually laid eyes on them before. But when you see the photos, there's just this feeling in your body and your heart that's like, that's me.

Connection. It's there and you're actually feeling through it for the first time in a way, but actually that's been there. Yeah. It felt like she was present in a way.

"That's me." Manzanares felt a presence, Ángel's presence. She related to her and felt a profound connection that had been there, deep inside. Like Shantel Martinez and Kelly Medina-López's 'Border Indigenous Logic' which relates spectral borderlands stories as those which are submerged "deep in the bones," Manzanares exhumed a presence that had been with her all along. It was just now that it began to take shape. Similar to Reyes' notion of 'embodied pedagogies of care,' Manzanares identifies with the findings and as she relates them to a treasure of photos found in the closet of one's grandma, great care must be taken into account so as to not tarnish or tear them, but to keep them in the best shape possible so that other's will know them, or that other's will feel that connection that has always been there. It will just come to light. Although there is pain there, it resurfaces to take shape and to share.

"It was written in her voice." Part of the connection and presence felt by Manzanares is also due in part to the narrative voicing in the ballad. Manzanares explains:

CS
How did it feel to sing in the first person? Like, what did it, what did you feel…what was that like?

LM
It just felt right. It just felt like something locked into place. Like there was a need.

Other times, [in] corridos…they talk about someone else. This person did [this] and that person did that. And so for those, some of the first songs that I learned to sing were corridos, like El corrido de Juanito, [el corrido de] Rosita Alvirez, both of which are corridos about women getting shot at a dance.

And both of them are painful, but in both of those, it sets the scene and it's like you're watching a movie. It's like you're seeing the scene.

But [with] Paula Ángel [it] was like, oh, here we are.

I can feel myself saying these things…The way she recounts things in the song is…in a very intimate kind of way.

Manzanares, wo has performed both *corridos* and *inditas*, relates the setting of the scene largely due to the narrative voicing. Ángel directly expresses her remorse and lament throughout the ballad. In the following verse, she laments her condition as *una hija desgraciada*[14] (a disgraced and unfortunate daughter):

[14]*Desgraciada* in traditional New Mexican Spanish carried much more weight than its English translation and can be referred to as one of the most deplorable conditions possible.

6. Madre mía pa' que tuvistes	*6. Mother of mine,*
why did you have	
una hija tan desgraciada,	*such an*
unfortunate daughter,	
madre mía pa' que tuvistes	*Mother of mine,*
why did you have	
una hija tan desgraciada.	*such an*
unfortunate daughter.	

When performing the ballad, Manzanares relates her vocals with the metaphor of riding a horse and shouting out the vocals. She relates this to her upbringing in a rural northern New Mexican community, where it's often common to communicate with greater intensity. In this case, Manzanares vocals' performance can be related to one of making Ángel's stories known, of the urgent need for others to know her story. As though she is saying, "Listen up, this is important, you need to hear me." She states:

> *...it's like I'm on horseback riding side saddle, which is weird because I never ride side saddle. I never. And being like, wow, trailed along somewhere. Because, I mean, that really resonates with her [Ángel] in a way—her journey, but she didn't really have control of the outcome.*

When embodied performances take shape, in this case, Manzanares is swept into the act and is transported by the horse through the wind. In essence, she does not have a choice for how the performance plays out. She has surrendered to the forces that be and she channels her experience into her performance. After all, Manzanares mentions how she felt like she already knew Pablita, even before she was introduced to her ballad:

> **CS**
> *Do you feel like you came to know…Pablita [more through the ballad]?*
>
> **LM**
> *That's the weird thing. I felt like I already knew her.*
>
> *It was like,"hi." Oh, here we are. Like this [is] going to happen.*
>
> *[Like] we have to do [this] right now and we're going to do it.*

Manzanares continues:

> *…there was sadness…and grief in the song itself and the suffering…And this like feeling of not having control. It all felt very familiar. Just based on my own experience as a human being.*
>
> *Sadness, but also, but there was also joy. Like the joy you get from singing [and] voicing it…voicing that history.*

> *…feeling really sort of intense, not necessarily me, but there's a feeling of joy and laughter and like, hey, here I am. Like you're doing a good thing by sharing it. [It] felt like she was happy, sort of.*
>
> *Even though the tale is so difficult.*

"Joy from voicing that history." Throughout the conversation, she made it clear about how this work is both needed and necessary. When relating how she channels this into her performance, she states:

> *[I'm not] channeling it…necessarily to just this person [Ángel], but I think in human history, I feel like we all have ancestors, male or female, but many female who have been subject to awful things.*

The necessity of this work is deeply tied to recovering, confronting, voicing, and healing from traumatic histories as in the case of Paula Ángel. We discussed this at the end of our conversation:

> **CS**
> *And so do you think that by doing this is, can it serve as a form of healing in any way?*
>
> **LM**
> *Yes. I think that it can just by bringing attention to it. And [by] establishing an emotional connection to our antepasados.*[15] *Whether they're related by blood or not…antepasados in general. All those people. And…honoring the suffering that they went through. Without having to dwell on it too much in a way. I think allowing ourselves to really feel that emotion is a really important part of the healing instead of denying it.*

A crucial element in embodying *La finada Paula Ángel,* is "honoring the suffering" of Paula Ángel, but also of so many others in this process of recovering traumatic histories through embodied performance. Through this work, Manzanares enables what Aldama, Sandoval, and García (2012) call an emancipatory aesthetics by exposing Ángel and her tragedy to others. As such, she transmits cultural agency while humanizing Ángel. Through her work, Ángel continues to exist in the collective consciousness.

La indita de Juliana Ortega

Nearly ten years prior to the execution of Paula Ángel in the year 1850, a young girl by the name of Juliana Ortega was married against her will in New Mexico. She was ten years old. Her ballad, *la indita de Juliana Ortega* was only recently recovered from the New Mexico State Collections and Archives by

[15]Antepasados are ancestors.

Senior Archivist, Samuel Sisneros. In her ballad Ortega describes her tragic situation:

Fui desposada muy niña	*When I was a small child I was married*
sin saber mi voluntad	*without me knowing and without my consent*
por mi madre fui casada	*by my father I was married off*
antes de cumplir la edad (2)	*before I was old enough. (2)*
Eran tantos mis trabajos	*My labors were so many*
y tanto mi padecer,	*and so much my suffering,*
que no tenía libertad	*that I was not at liberty*
ni aun para poder comer. (6)	*even to eat. (6)*

She pleads and fights for a divorce in court. Divorce is granted only on the condition that she strip her clothes off as they were not her property:

Ya llegamos Alburquerque,	*We got to Alburquerque,*
llegué a la tierra de vos,	*I arrived on your land,*
donde tuve libertad	*where I was freed*
por la voluntad de Dios. (16)	*by the will of God. (16)*
Cuando salí de la Corte	*When I left the Court*
a cien varas caminar,	*walking a hundred yards,*
me salieron acreedores	*[my husband's] creditors appeared*
para hacerme desnudar. (17)	*to strip me bare. (17)*
La ropa que traía puesta	*The clothes I wore*
no era de mi propiedad,	*did not belong to me,*
pues me traían a favores	*well, in their shrewdness*
con toda sagacidad. (18)	*they showed me off. (18)*

She begs all mothers not to marry their children until they are old enough. Ultimately, she renounces marriage altogether:

Y ruego a todas las madres	*I plead to all the mothers*
que vivan con caridad,	*who have love in your hearts*
que no casen a sus niñas	*do not marry off your young daughters*
antes de cumplir la edad. (25)	*before they are old enough (25)*
Ya con esta me despido,	*With this I say farewell*
mi historia es bastante larga,	*my story is quite long*
renuncio los matrimonios	*I renounce marriage*

por la vida tan amarga. (26) *for the bitter life I have lived. (26)*

La indita de Juliana Ortega has been recently performed by musician and poet, Brenda Romero and literary folklorist Enrique Lamadrid and is featured in the newly released audio CD *Café y Atole* (2022). Readers are encouraged to listen to it here.

Interview with Brenda Romero

From relating confronting patriarchy to relating the performance of *la indita de Juliana Ortega* to familial and regional tales of child marriage, these are just some of the most compelling topics covered while interviewing singer and poet, Brenda Romero who has performed the ballad for a live audience and who also recorded it as a duet as mentioned in the previous section. From the start of the interview, Romero relates Juliana Ortega's story with her own awareness of child marriage in the region:

> *I was already aware of the fact that women were married off at a very young age because my grandmother was only 13 [when she married, and] my Tía [Aunt] was only 13…my Tía was married to a man much older than her. I think he was 29 when she was 13.*

Romero, having been born and raised in New Mexico to a long line of multi-generational *nuevomexicanos*, not only expressed her familial upbringing at the time, but also related it to the normalization of traditional gender roles:

> *I'm trying to think whether, to what extent I might have embodied her experience.*
>
> *I've had other experiences…my daughter was raped when she was only about 14, 13.*
>
> *And my Tia…who married the man 29 years older than her, they stayed together.*
>
> *They had 13 children. And, she died before him. He lived to be 104, and she died at 79, I think.*
>
> *And so, you have to expect that the women were so bound by these traditions, in a way.*

With a normalization of such traditional patriarchal order, the experience of learning about Juliana Ortega was not an uncommon one. In the seminal work, *When Jesus Came The Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico (1500-1846),* Ramón Gutiérrez finds empirical evidence for nuptial agreements, with particular focus on the eighteenth century. He states, "A young nuptial guaranteed a high level of fertility and a quick reproduction of the area's population" (274). The reproduction model functioned within the agrarian labor society of New Mexico which persisted until the twentieth century

with modernization. Yet, what was most striking for Romero was the ability to fight for and achieve a divorce:

> *The fact that Juliana was able to get a divorce made her very interesting to me… as a person, …as a woman, and as a performer, because I had no idea.*
>
> *That was the very first time that I ever learned that any woman had been able to divorce her husband.*

Romero reflects on this uncommon practice within the northern New Mexico community of Lydon where she was raised:

> *My Tía Candelaria, my Aunt Candy, who is really not my Tía, but she functioned as our Tía through our childhood. She got the first divorce in Lydon…she got a divorce from my Uncle Joe…In any case, the women, they would see her coming and they would, they'd do this cross thing that people do…with their fingers.*
>
> *But yeah, people, they see her coming…they would [make the cross with their fingers]*.
>
> *And that was the very first time that I ever learned about a woman getting a divorce. And she suffered from…she was punished by the community, by the women. Maybe many of them who had stayed in terrible relationships.*

Romero's recollection of the first divorce in her community entailed a community-wide response. Customary was the role of women to subside with their spouse. When the community norm of a woman divorcing her husband occurred, a cross-like sign was made with the thumb, and the index finger was made to warn others of this deviant behavior and to protect themselves from what may have been viewed as a sin. Women who deviated from the patriarchal norm were, in this case, branded. In other cases of deviant behavior of *nuevomexicanas*, women may have even been perceived as *brujas*, or witches.[16] In either case, women who did not follow the cultural norm were punished, as Romero states. They were encouraged to stay married, especially if they had children:

> *I think that my mother got so upset with my dad once early on when they only had two kids that she went to see an attorney to get a divorce.*
>
> *But the attorney said, Mrs. Romero, do you have children?*
>
> *Yes [she replied]*
>
> *How many? [he asked]*
>
> *Two [she stated]*

[16]See Scorcia, Carmella. "Witch Tales of El Guache: An Ethnopoetic Analysis" *Journal of the Southwest,* (58,4): 2016. Pp. 781-812.

Mrs. Romero, go home [he said]

So in a way….what I'm hearing is that these experiences, even though this is a very traumatic experience when we think about [Juliana Ortega]. It's also not that uncommon to relate her experience to so many others that were prevalent.

And the other thing…with my mom, for instance, was that when he said, go home—it's because…if you got a divorce…the father took the kids.

Not only was the woman subjected to ostracization from her own community for going against traditional norms, she was also subjected to a system of patriarchal order in which the male divorcee would have custody of the children.

Community practices and norms are so deeply entrenched that dire consequences such as losing one's children are evident. Such is the case in the captivating performance art by scholar, actress and artist, Rosalía Pacheco. In her performance of the tale, *La Llorona,* Pacheco shows how the community has the ultimate power in the fate of the female protagonist, known as la Llorona. In this legendary tale of *La Llorona* performed by Pacheco, a man goes against his father's wishes and marries a woman of a lower social class and they have two children. Once his father finds out about the situation, he orders his son to take the kids and to banish the woman from the community. As the husband tells this to his wife, she weeps and she weeps without realizing that her kids, not yet taken away, fall into the river and because she is weeping so heavily, she does not hear their cries for help. Like Romero's recounting of a possible divorce between her parents in which the father would take the children away from their mother, Pacheco also portrays the patriarchal norms that take precedent in the community. *La Llorona* continues to weep for her children throughout the years.[17]

In the case of *la indita de Juliana Ortega,* Romero speaks to the difference between singing the ballad as a duet with a male colleague and how the dynamic was different in comparison to singing it alone or without the accompaniment of a man:

CS:
Through the act of singing this story in her narrative voice, did you feel like you came to know her better, or other stories similar to her?

BR:
If I hadn't been singing with a man…I might have been able to put more feeling into the way I sang it…I might have put more emotion into [it as] if I was singing her.

[17]Often, the Mexican tale of *La llorona* is depicted as a native woman marrying a Spaniard who has an affair. Although they have children, in her rage, the woman takes the children and drowns them. The tale is often related to the Indigenous woman, *La Malinche* who was the translator and interpreter for the Spanish colonizer of Mexico, Hernán Cortés. The tale often associates her weeping as a loss of the Indigenous culture. It is often recounted as a cautionary tale for children to stay away from running water of the rivers and irrigation systems known as *acequias*.

Had Romero been able to perform the piece as a solo, the emotional charge and conveyance would have affected the embodied performance. In fact, she sings another *indita* ballad, *la cautiva Marcelina* as a solo. With similar resonances, *la cautiva Marcelina* is about the abduction of Marcelina after having watched the killing of her siblings, her father, and her children. It is a tale of cross-cultural relationships most likely between Hispano and Indigenous tribes at the time. Some have hypothesized her abduction by the Comanche tribe. Narrated in the first person, she expresses her lament for all her family members and for the unwillingness and ineptitude to ever love again:

La cautiva Marcelina	*When Marcelina the captive*
cuando llegó a los cerritos,	*arrived at the little hills,*
cuando llegó a los cerritos	*arrived at the little hills,*
volteó la cara llorando,	*she looked back crying,*
—Mataron a mis hijitos,	*—They killed my little children,*
mataron a mis hijitos.	*they killed my little children.*
Por eso ya no quiero	*For this, in this world,*
en el mundo más amar	*I am unable tol ove anymore*
De mi querida patria	*They are taking me away*
me van a retirar	*Of my beloved homeland*[18]

Readers may listen to Brenda Romero's version of *la cuativa Marcelina* here.

Although Romero believes that she may not have been able to fully encapsulate the emotional resonances of Juliana Ortega due to performing it as a duet with a male colleague, for future study, it will be helpful to receive participant and audience feedback from not only the performances of both *la indita de Juliana Ortega* and *la cautiva Marcelina* but it will also be valuable to see what emotions resonate with them as active participants. In either case, Romero funnels her own experience of the marginalization of women within the confines of patriarchal order into her performances. In this way, she exercises cultural agency as having the potential to heal:

CS
How is it, even though that this is so traumatic, how can your performances function as forms of healing?

BR
Well, I think just telling the story and making these stories, you know, teaching these stories in classrooms, that it's just part of the struggle of women's equality.

"Just telling the story." Making these stories known lends itself to greater discussions surrounding these difficult histories. English studies scholar

[18]Author's translation.

Jonathan Wilson relates the importance of bringing participants into traumatic histories to enable them to feel and to process them, and then to act (224). Although the results may not always have a positive outcome, it illuminates collective generational trauma amongst women and correlates to contemporary struggles endured as mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Cultural Agency and Redemption

Throughout this dialogue, several common themes are apparent between Lara Manzanares and Brenda Romero. Both agreed that had they been singing alone it may have come across with greater intimacy, and more emotion perhaps. Both recognize the importance of sharing the stories through performance and education around the performances. Both agree on the need and necessity of doing this, especially given the state of women's rights in the world and the struggles that continue. Both contribute to reimagining a collective cultural history through the channeling of their experiences and their connections that are rooted in the region. Although traumatic, these embodied performances allow singers to channel their own experiences into the transmission of their performances as a process of redemption. When speaking about trauma and performance protest, Diana Taylor mentions, "Its efficacy depends on its ability to provoke recognition and reaction in the here and now rather than rely on past recollection. It insists on physical presence: one can participate only by *being there*. Its only hope for survival…is that they catch on; others will continue the practice" (188). With the vast oral traditions of the area, New Mexico, like many other areas in the U.S. Southwest borderlands, continues to face challenges with maintaining its language of Spanish as a practiced heritage language.[19] With strong assimilation efforts coupled with intergenerational traumatic experiences of using Spanish in public spaces[20] and changes to language requirements at local universities.[21] Yet, through embodied performance in the heritage language of Spanish, performers are able to revitalize and maintain the language, thus taking an active role in one's cultural agency. Taylor eloquently emphasizes, "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices" (Xvi). Through this project, embodied action of *la finada Paula Ángel* and *La indita Juliana Ortega is* cultural agency.

[19]I define heritage language learner as one who has a personal connection with the language of their community and/or heritage.

[20]See MacGregor-Mendoza, Patricia. "Aquí no se habla español: Stories of linguistic repression in Southwest schools." *Bilingual Research Journal* 24, no. 4 (2000): 355-367.

[21]I mention in my dissertation that some universities are changing their language requirements to requiring only one semester of a language other than English. In an area where the Spanish heritage language is undergoing a shift to English and language loss is already rampant, these measures only exacerbate it, and it becomes especially detrimental to heritage language learners of the region. See Scorcia Pacheco, Carmella, Feminine-Voiced Balladry of New Mexico: Genealogy, Poetics, and Recovery Of *La Indita De Juliana Ortega, La Finada De Paula Ángel,* And *El Corrido De La Votación*, University of Arizona, 2023.

Performers and participants are encased within the ballad tradition that hold vital lifelines into the U.S. Southwest borderlands of New Mexico.

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